Ministry of Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

Log Number: 08-22-96
Week of May 26, 2008

IMMIGRATION HELPS SOLVE LABOUR CHALLENGES

A finalist for this year's Venture Forward Business Plan Competition is promoting an immigration-centred growth strategy for businesses that could help agricultural companies and producers meet their labour challenges.

Dirk Propp, owner and CEO of the Saskatoon-based International Immigration and Business Consulting (IIBC), finds symmetries between foreign workers anxious to come to Canada and businesses that desperately need both skilled and unskilled labour.

"For foreign workers, it's their dream to come here. For them to have the opportunity to come to Canada, whether it's permanently or just for two years, it allows them to save and send money home to their families," said Propp.

"The businesses gain because they're having trouble finding both skilled and unskilled labour. By bringing in foreign workers who are excited and really want to work in Saskatchewan, where they will make very good money, it's a dream come true."

Key to the success of IIBC is Propp's ability to sell Saskatchewan as a place to live. He says the most attractive qualities to immigrants are the province's economic growth and potential, the abundance of space, clean air and water, high-quality amenities, natural beauty and sense of community.

IIBC recruits workers from Latin America and Asia, and is developing a recruitment strategy for Europe. Propp expects to place 40 to 50 foreign workers in the next six months.

Communication, co-ordination and accommodation help develop a connection between the employer and the employee. Moreover, extra steps must be taken to help foreign workers attach to their new communities.

IIBC staff members pick up workers at the airport, help them establish residence and a bank account, complete applications for government documents, and make them aware of the cultural and tourism opportunities that exist in their new communities.

"We want them to feel welcome when they get here so that they'll want to stay," Propp said.

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At the work site, they must adjust to the high level of attention paid to workplace safety. In addition, interpersonal working relationships are more important to Canadian employees than in other countries. On the employers' side, information sessions conducted by IIBC outline the expectations placed upon them when hiring a foreign worker.

The administrative environment for immigration issues is constantly changing. While a significant amount of research is required by IIBC to keep on top of regulations, conditions are improving, according to Propp. In the past few months, the provincial government has added resources to the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program that have decreased the processing time.

"When you're competing with other provinces and countries in the world to attract talent, you have to have fast processing times. The provincial government addressed that immediately," he said.

Propp sees potential in Saskatchewan's agricultural sector. "The agricultural companies need machinists and welders and skilled workers to do the jobs." IIBC hopes to expand in this direction to help the industry meet its production goals.

In the meantime, Propp has his sights set on the Venture Forward Business Plan Competition. IIBC is one of eight finalists competing for $100,000 in prize money. The results will be announced in late May.

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